

## READING AND COMPARING: TRACKS AND INTO THE WILD

### INTRODUCTIONS

Into the Wild (2007) is a non-linear survival film directed by Sean Penn, which is based on Jon Krakauer's 1996 novel of the same name. It recollects the final few months of the life of Christopher McCandless as he departs from society in both an act of resistance as well as a means of self-discovery. A bright young college student in the 1990s, McCandless abandons his family and affluent lifestyle to embark on a frontier-style journey into the Alaskan wilderness. Troubled by a dysfunctional family and disenchanted with the materialistic excesses of 1980s America, McCandless seeks a radical engagement with nature, in the style of his literary heroes Henry David Thoreau and Jack London. After 113 days in the wilderness, he suffers from starvation and dies. The true story of McCandless' journey renders the film an important depiction of self-reliance, isolation, and the unparalleled power of nature.

Whilst the film is of a biographical nature, it is important to understand that it is heavily subject to the interpretations and opinions of Penn. The story is informed by McCandless' writings, and interviews with those who knew him, but is ultimately a work of artistic interpretation. Nonetheless, Penn's film offers strong commentary regarding the materialistic, consumerist nature of modern living, whilst also ultimately emphasising the more humanistic importance of family and love.

Tracks is Robyn Davidson's 1980 memoir detailing her perilous journey through 1700 miles of Australian outback and the remarkable character transformations that take place throughout. The events of the story begin in 1973, when a young Robyn Davidson arrives in Alice Springs with an outlandish plan to train wild camels to accompany her through the Australian desert. When, after two years of gruelling training, she receives a sponsorship from National Geographic, her journey can finally go ahead- on the condition that a photographer accompany her and document parts of the journey. This compromise weighs heavily on Robyn, as photographer Rick Smolan intrudes on her solitude and compromises everything the trip means to her. As Robyn delves deeper into the journey, each day brings new discoveries about the camels, the landscape, the people of Australia, and ultimately, her self. 'Tracks' emerges as a candid and compelling story of one woman's odyssey of discovery and transformation.

Whilst Tracks is mostly a personal account, it also presents a co-existent dichotomy between modernistic libertarianism and conventionalism, which serves as a reflection of the changing political views and ideological turbulence of the time, as Davidson notes 'you could choose not to participate in politics, but you could not avoid politics'. Thus, in many ways Davidson's journey can be seen as a firm statement that challenges the inherent sexism, racism, and 'status quo', whilst also simultaneously embracing the notion of freedom, independence, and escape from conventionalism and 'self-indulgent negativity'.

### THEMES

Theme	Tracks	Into the Wild	Quote
Self-discovery in nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nature presents an escape route from a social political context with which Robyn feels profoundly at odds.</li> <li>- Robyn must contend with the brutality of the Australian desert: she encounters wild bulls, the unpredictable nature of her camels, hostile strangers and vast stretches of isolation.</li> <li>- Her ability to learn from her environment and adapt to it, is instrumental in her survival.</li> <li>- Nature is the locus of her self-discovery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nature represents the chance to engage with an alternative set of values, removed from the materialistic excesses of urban America.</li> <li>- Drawn to the romantic, literary conception of nature.</li> <li>- Chris believes he can survive in the untamed wilderness of Alaska despite little training and preparation.</li> <li>- Nature is the locus of his self-discovery, but also what destroys him.</li> <li>- His deterioration and inability to survive in the wilderness suggests the incomparable force of nature.</li> </ul>	<p>TRACKS:</p> <p>“Capacity for survival may be the ability to be changed by environment.”</p> <p>“I was remembering exactly who I was now.” (p. 154)</p> <p>INTO THE WILD:</p> <p>“I'm going to paraphrase Thoreau here... rather than love, than money, than faith, than fame, than fairness... give me truth.”</p>
Resistance to conformity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robyn rebels against the concept of the passive, docile woman of the 1970s</li> <li>• Alternatively, she is a product of the time in which she lives: the radical social and political changes of 1970s Australia. She manifests as a feminist icon- but she is ambivalent about this.</li> <li>• Fiercely independent, solitary, troubled.</li> <li>• Rebels against the concept that women should find contentment in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chris rejects the expectations of his education and class privilege.</li> <li>• Chris views his abusive father as an example of what he is expected to become.</li> <li>• Abandons all material possessions: burns money and car.</li> <li>• Actions are anarchist, anti-conformist. But somewhat misguided and inspired by a regressive desire to punish his family – motives not pure.</li> </ul>	<p>TRACKS:</p> <p>“I had a long session with the mirror that afternoon, trying to find out if I was a bourgeois individualist or not.” (p. 88)</p> <p>“I was now public property. I was now a feminist symbol. I was now an object of ridicule for small- minded sexists and I was a crazy, irresponsible adventurer (though not as crazy as I would have been had I failed).” (p. 236)</p> <p>INTO THE WILD</p>

	<p>motherhood and marriage.</p>		<p>"I think careers are a 20th century invention and I don't want one. "</p>
<p>Planning and preparation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Robyn lives in Alice Springs for two years before she departs, she engages with locals and trains the camels.</li> <li>- On her journey, she respects the wishes of the indigenous people and subsequently learns from them how to navigate the environment.</li> <li>- After extensive preparation, guidance, planning and support from family and friends – Robyn is able to depart with a degree of confidence in her trip. She eventually becomes able to rely on her instincts, but this is after intense experiences in the desert.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chris' literary heroes and their romantic depictions of the wild inform his understanding of nature.</li> <li>- His idealism informs his naivety. He professes to have no watch, no axe, and no map. This lack of preparation is an important factor in his demise.</li> </ul>	<p>TRACKS:</p> <p>"Capacity for survival may be the ability to be changed by environment."</p> <p>"Throughout the trip I had been gaining an awareness and an understanding of the earth as I learnt how to depend upon it." (p. 191)</p> <p>"trust your instincts, and don't rely on maps"</p> <p>INTO THE WILD:</p> <p>"No, man. Alaska, Alaska. I'm gonna be all the way out there, all the way fucking out there. Just on my own. You know, no fucking watch, no map, no axe, no nothing. No nothing. Just be out there. Just be out there in it."</p>
<p>Isolation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Robyn identifies complete isolation as the only way to truly connect with the landscape she is immersed in.</li> <li>- Profoundly affected by Rick Smolan's intrusion into her</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identifies independence and isolation as central to his journey.</li> <li>- Abandons family, money, and ties to previous life, adopts the pseudonym 'Alexander Supertramp'</li> </ul>	<p>INTO THE WILD:</p> <p>"Happiness is only real when shared"</p> <p>"I will miss you too, but you are wrong if you think that the joy of life comes principally from the joy of human relationships."</p>

	<p>physical and emotional space.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Independence equates to freedom</li> <li>- Experiences powerful relationships: Rick, Mr Eddie. These relationships further her own personal transformations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Independence equates to freedom</li> <li>- Experiences significant, formative relationships on his journey. Rainey and Jan, Ron.</li> <li>- Chris appears to have a transformative power over these people's lives, but is emotionally removed himself.</li> </ul>	<p>TRACKS: "My aloneness was a treasure"</p> <p>"I had sold a great swatch of my freedom and most of the trip's integrity for four thousand dollars" (p. 99)</p> <p>"There was no one but myself to rely on now..." (p. 38)</p> <p>"All I remember of that first day alone was a feeling of release; a sustained, buoyant confidence as I strolled along." (p. 109)</p>
Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Robyn feels she loses her subjective agency as her story is manipulated and repackaged for consumption.</li> <li>- Distrustful of Rick's photographs and the journey they claim to depict.</li> <li>- Describes in the post-script that she feels the journey has become distorted, no longer her own.</li> <li>- Uncomfortable with the concept of being a feminist icon, the 'camel lady' –the purity of the journey and her motivations are compromised.</li> <li>- Davidson points out her own unreliability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- McCandless' story is interpreted by Penn and Kraukaur.</li> <li>- Based on the vestiges of his life we understand, the photos and relics left behind.</li> <li>- Carine serves as a principal narrator. Much of her narration appears to be fuelled by her own desire to understand his actions.</li> <li>- The film is made fifteen years after the real events occurred.</li> </ul>	<p>TRACKS: (The photos): "represented a loss of subjective agency, and that the journey, MY journey, would eventually be subsumed by its reconstructions"</p> <p>INTO THE WILD: "With almost a year having passed since Chris' disappearance my parents' anger had turned to desperation. Their guilt was giving way to pain. And pain seemed to bring them closer. Even their faces had changed."</p>

	as a narrator, she is writing two years after the events and relying solely on her imperfect memory.		
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## CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Both Robyn Davidson and Christopher McCandless are products of the time period in which they live, and reject the concept of adhering to a predetermined notion of who they should be and how they should behave. Both embark on their journey because they reject the expectations of their class and gender.

	Description	Analysis
Robyn Davidson	Davidson is a fiercely independent, solitary, and troubled character. She struggles with her identity and values; at times, seems incongruous with the wider world. Robyn thrives on her journey and emerges as a stronger, more determined woman who has embraced herself and her identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Her dependence on her animals suggests her inability to engage in healthy human relationships.</li> <li>- Her connection with the land and indigenous Australians is in constant tension with her disdain for the media attention she receives.</li> <li>- The media, represented by Rick Smolan, is a vestige of the materialistic world she detests. The presence of the media on her journey infiltrates the sanctity of her time and relationships with indigenous peoples.</li> </ul>
Christopher McCandless	Chris is gregarious, intense and intelligent. He seeks a solitary life, but paradoxically, makes relationships easily and leaves a strong impression on all those he encounters. Chris manifests as a more restless, stubborn, idealistic character than Robyn. There is a dysfunctional quality about McCandless that drives him into fatal isolation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He is fundamentally a privileged person, and this privilege manifests in the naivety he brings to the journey – without a map or compass.</li> <li>- His desire to immerse himself in nature and abandon all material possessions suggests a need to punish his parents for his volatile upbringing.</li> <li>- Deeply distrusts human relationships despite the genuine love of the people he encounters.</li> </ul>

SIMILARITIES	DIFFERENCES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Both embark on their journey because they reject the expectations of their class and gender. Chris sees his father as an example of what he is expected to become, while Robyn rebels against the concept that women should find contentment in motherhood and marriage.</li> <li>- For Robyn and Chris, independence equates to freedom. Despite their desire to be completely alone, both discover that no individual can be completely free from the need for others. Robyn and Chris experience formative relationships in their travels, which further their own personal transformations.</li> <li>- Both Robyn and Chris identify complete isolation as the only way to truly connect with the landscape they are immersed in.</li> <li>- Nature presents an escape route for both protagonists, an opportunity to engage with an alternative set of values, and tests the limits of their emotional and physical strength.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Robyn and Chris have fundamentally different perceptions of nature. Chris seeks enlightenment in the romantic, literary wild depicted in his favourite novels. Robyn is drawn to the brutality of the Australian outback and survives by learning from her environment and the people who inhabit it.</li> <li>- Chris' romantic perception of nature directly contrasts Robyn's grounded, temporal understanding of her environment.</li> <li>- Robyn prepares for her journey for two years. She actively seeks out training and mentors, she reaches out to National Geographic – and although she resents the contingencies of the deal, she is ultimately financially safe in her travels.</li> <li>- Chris travels extensively before his main solo trek, but the film focuses more on his personal growth during this time, and the relationships with the people he encounters. He does not undertake the same rigorous preparation as Robyn.</li> </ul>

## AUTHORS VIEWS/VALUES

### TRACKS

#### **Women's rights in 1970s Australia**

'Tracks' is set in the late 1970s, an era of intense social and political change in Australia. The second wave feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s were enormously influential in Australia, as women began to dismantle the sexist structures inherent in Australian society at this time. Davidson describes Alice Springs as hopelessly in the grips of a 'cult of misogyny'. She rejects the archetype of the passive, docile woman. She is passionately determined to

shed her own sense of herself as traditionally “feminine,” a quality she sees as arising from being trained from birth to be “door-mattish”.

Davidson acknowledges her gender has played a central part in the media’s fascination with her journey. The character of the ‘camel lady’ that emerges suggests the significance of her trip, as a woman travelling alone in the 1970s through intensely difficult terrain. Davidson describes the late sixties and early seventies as a time of radical social time, when “anything and everything seemed possible, and when the status quo of the developed world was under radical scrutiny by its youth”. Thus Davidson’s actions must be considered in the context of this time, at the peak of the second wave feminist movement.

There are many explicit examples of Robyn facing misogyny and embodying feminist principles. One such example is when an Alice Springs local suggests she’s the “next town rape case”. This statement reveals the position of a woman in this misogynistic society, wherein a single woman travelling alone through the bush was synonymous with danger and irresponsibility. Davidson rejects this ideology and refuses to succumb to the violent sexism she encounters, or compromise her journey.

‘Tracks’ is not an explicitly feminist text, but it clearly echoes the philosophies of feminism. In the years since the trek, Robyn Davidson has become a feminist symbol of defiance, endurance and strength. Thus to consider ‘Tracks’ from a feminist perspective is important when studying this text, Davidson’s criticisms of Australian misogyny inform our understanding of this historical context, and the significance of her actions.

Some example sentences:

- Davidson exposes the realities of misogynistic Australian culture in the 1970s.
- Davidson’s journey emerges as a defiant example of women’s strength and independence.
- Davidson’s friendship with Gladly Posel suggests the injustices of women’s financial dependence on abusive men and condemns the limited options for women, particularly for those in rural settings.
- ‘Tracks’ challenges the constraints of gender through a narrator that cannot be defined by stereotypical images of the domestic and passive female.

## **Indigenous Rights in Australia**

The 1970s saw the first attempts to improve the lives and rights of indigenous Australians. In 1971 Indigenous people were counted in the census, and in 1976, the Aboriginal Land Rights Act was established.

Davidson’s time with Mr Eddie exposes her to the harsh reality of the living conditions of Indigenous Australian’s throughout the 1970s, as well as inspiring a deep appreciation for the culture and connection with the land. Davidson is frustrated with the mistreatment of Indigenous people in Australia, and feels ambivalent about her status as a white, privileged, outsider in their community. Davidson confronts the racist and discriminatory stereotypes and attitudes towards Indigenous Australians, and experiences first hand the realities of the issues these people face. Davidson encounters intense generosity and friendship in the Indigenous

community that she admires and presents as a stark contrast to the intolerant attitudes of white Australians in Alice Springs.

Quotes:

- “The blacks were unequivocally the enemy – dirty, lazy, dangerous”
- “Aborigines. Warm, friendly, laughing, excited, tired Pitjantjara Aborigines...” (p. 155)
- “Ceremonies are the visible link between Aboriginal people and their land. Once dispossessed of this land, ceremonial life deteriorates, people lose their strength, meaning and identity.” (p. 167)

Some example sentences:

- Davidson renegotiates her identity and relationship with the land after learning from the Indigenous Australians.
- Davidson condemns the racist attitudes of white Australians towards the aboriginal people.
- Davidson embodies the changing attitudes of young Australians towards aboriginal Australians, endorsing a respectful relationship with the traditional land owners.

### INTO THE WILD:

#### **Social criticism of materialistic excess**

While ‘Into the Wild’ is set in the 1990s, McCandless’ formative years were the 1980s – a decade characterised by the consumerism, extravagance, and materialism of President Reagan’s America. The reverberating effects of this time period inform McCandless’ general outlook and disdain for American society. Whilst this contempt for consumerism is one motivation for McCandless’ actions, he is equally troubled by the family violence and dysfunction he experienced as a young man. This traumatic past informs his extreme actions and outlook.

Example sentences:

- Penn exposes the effects of materialistic society on young impressionable people.
- Penn explores the consequences of experiencing childhood trauma, and how this manifests in adult actions.
- Penn condemns the expectations of 21<sup>st</sup> century nuclear families.
- Penn endorses the liberating power of familial love and relationships.

#### **Depiction of the unparalleled power of nature and man’s inability to contend with it**

Inspired by Thoreau and London, Chris seeks enlightenment in the wild. Despite a philosophical understanding of the power of nature, Chris believes he can survive the untamed wilderness of Alaska. Although nature is the locus for self-realisation and growth for Chris, it is also what destroys him. As the viewer watches him slowly deteriorate, we come to fully comprehend the force of nature – suggesting man’s inability to control it.

Some example sentences:

- Penn's depiction of McCandless' deterioration suggests human's inability to control nature.
- Penn endorses the liberating power of literature, but cautions the idealism contained within romantic depictions of nature.

## LITERARY TECHNIQUES

- Narrative voice

An important aspect of *Into the Wild* to consider is that McCandless' story, while true, is told through Sean Penn's directorial lens, which is in turn based on Jon Krakauer's book. The story is informed by McCandless' writings, and interviews with those who knew him, but is ultimately a work of artistic interpretation. Consider how this affects a viewer's perception of Chris, does this raise questions around representation and identity? This is in direct contrast to *Tracks*, which is a first person, linear past tense, autobiographical account of the writer's experience. Where Robyn is completely in control of her narrative, McCandless' is subject to the artistic interpretation of others.

TRACKS	INTO THE WILD
Narrative voice: Robyn Davidson <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- first person</li> <li>- linear past tense</li> <li>- autobiographical</li> <li>- post-script</li> </ul>	Narrative voice: Chris, Corin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- non-linear</li> <li>- fractured</li> <li>- composite narrative from diary extracts, writings, artistic interpretation from director</li> </ul>

## SYMBOLS:

Tracks	Into the wild
<b>Animals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Camels are a significant symbol of adaptation. As foreign, introduced creatures in Australia, which became well adapted to the nature of the Australian outback.</li> <li>- As part of the colonial history of Australia, camels serve as a symbol of one of the first explorers of colonial Australia, and are intricately tied to Robyn's position as an outsider in this land – in both the immediate sense of</li> </ul>	<b>The belt</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Symbolises Chris' deterioration as he is forced to puncture multiple holes in the belt, as he grows thinner.</li> <li>- An object of materialistic society, serving as a marker of his failure to survive beyond it.</li> <li>- Linked to his starvation, hunger.</li> <li>- As he succumbs to hunger, we see his human vulnerability. He ironically states that he is "Starving for</li> </ul>

<p>her being a young, white, woman – and her position as representative of the colonial powers that colonised this country and displaced the indigenous people.</p>	<p>freedom” before he abandons his life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As the belt holes increase and his waist physical appearance is drastically altered, Chris becomes irate and screams into the abyss of the Alaskan wilderness: “I’m hungry! I’m fucking hungry!”</li> </ul>
<p><b>The camera/the photographs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Symbol of her ambivalence towards Rick</li> <li>- Represents her feelings of having “sold out” to national geographic through agreeing to be accompanied by the photographer</li> <li>- The “click” noise the camera makes represents the incessant and intrusive nature of the media on this journey.</li> <li>- Robyn objects to Rick’s decision to photograph the indigenous people. She is furious when he intrudes on their secret ceremony and sacred business. Here, Rick and his camera represent the ignorant and disrespectful attitudes of the broader white community.</li> <li>- Davidson’s connection with the land and the indigenous Australian people she encounters is central to the story, yet is in constant tension with her disdain for the media attention she receives, which infiltrates the sanctity of her journey and relationships with indigenous peoples.</li> <li>- She describes the camera in the language of deceit. “Never let it be said that the camera does not lie”</li> <li>- The photographs, which are included in the book, are vestiges of the woman and trip that Davidson professes to feel removed from. She explains her dissociation with these images as based in their inaccuracy, depicting her as a model and the earth as the ‘backdrop’.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Novels</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A recurring symbol in ‘Into the Wild’ is literature; Chris takes many novels into the wilderness, and each book speaks of a part of his philosophy. Henry David Thoreau’s ‘Walden’ is central to Chris’ conception of the wild. The book is a reflection upon simple living in nature; Thoreau encourages solitary life and civil disobedience.</li> <li>- This emphasis on romantic literature is reflected in his ideology and justifications for his journey.</li> <li>- Chris often quotes Leo Tolstoy’s ‘Family Happiness’. The novel lists what is needed for happiness: quiet, seclusion, rest, nature, books, music, love. There are significant parallels between Tolstoy and McCandless, Tolstoy rejected his inheritance and adopted a moral and ascetic philosophy.</li> </ul> <p>“I love not man the less, but nature more” – Lord Byron</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quoted in the opening credits of the film, embodying Chris’ romantic ideology.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Davidson argues that a photograph “lies like a pig in mud. It captures the projection of whoever happens to be using it, never the truth.”</li> <li>- In the postscript, Davidson describes the photos making her “uneasy”. She states they “represented a loss of subjective agency”.</li> </ul>	
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## Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism is defined as the attribution of human characteristics or behaviour to a god, animal, or object. Robyn repeatedly personifies the animals she encounters.

The camels in particular take on their own human personalities in her life. This technique, called anthropomorphism, can be used to complement a discussion of the theme of isolation. Robyn attributes distinct characteristics to each camel, suggesting her need for companionship and the powerful absence of human connection in prolonged periods of isolation.

Davidson’s depiction of her dependence on animals reveals deeper meanings about her inability to depend on, and communicate with, humans in the same way. Robyn’s reliance on her dog, Dookie, becomes more intense as the journey continues. Upon Dookie’s death, both the reader and Robyn experience the dog’s death as a powerful blow.

Examples:

*“I am quite sure Diggity was more than a dog, or rather other than dog. (p. 207)”*

*“But I said goodbye to a creature I had loved unconditionally, without question. ... I walked out into the morning and felt nothing. I was numb, empty. All I knew was I mustn’t stop walking. (p. 223) ”*

*“Diggity had become a cherished friend rather than simply a pet. (p. 227)”*

Kate: *“remembered humans and hated them”*

Zeieika: *“had a lovely gentle nature” “the street-smart, crafty, unfazable, self-possessed leader”*

Dookie: *“nominally king, but if anything untoward happened he was the first to hide behind Zeieika’s skirts”*

Goliath: *“cheeky, pushy, self-centred, demanding, petulant, arrogant, spoilt and delightful”*

## SAMPLE PARAGRAPHS

Prompt: Discuss the ways in which the environment assists the protagonists in their journey for self-discovery.

### Introduction:

In forging connections with the environment and people around us, humans end up inadvertently discovering themselves. It is this notion that resonates throughout both Robyn Davidson's 1970 memoir, *Tracks*, and Sean Penn's 2007 film, *Into the Wild*, where the relationships that the protagonists form throughout their journeys leads to intense self-discovery and growth. Both Davidson and McCandless seek knowledge and guidance through both the individuals they meet and, specifically to McCandless, the books he reads, citing it as a means of grappling with the fundamental stages of self-discovery. Whilst Davidson and McCandless experience different relationships with their immediate family, it is ultimately the concept of family that underpins their motivations and inspires them to pursue their journeys – both physical and psychological. Further, the respective temporal environments in which both protagonists are immersed in emerge as a distinct theme that facilitates each stage of self-discovery in the climatic lead up to the ultimate self-realisation.

### Body Paragraph 1:

Both 'Into the Wild' and 'Tracks' endorse the guiding power of influential figures on both protagonists, as a catalyst for their growth. Davidson commences her self-described 'lunatic' journey with little knowledge of the wild to substantiate her mammoth ambition. That her drive outweighs her preparation manifests in the early moments of the text, wherein Davidson endures a grueling internship with the impulsive 'maniac' Kurt Posel. This man appears the epitome of the 'biased, bigoted, boring and above all, brutal' man she describes as the stereotypical 'Aussie male'. Kurt is abusive to both Davidson and his wife, but his eccentric and impulsive ways expose her to the harsh realities of bush living. Ultimately, Kurt's guidance allows Davidson to gain the fundamental skills she needs to train camels, whose dispositions reflect the erratic nature of Kurt himself. In direct contrast to this tense, exploitative relationship, is Davidson's nuanced and spiritually rewarding relationship with Mr. Eddie, an aboriginal elder whom she describes as a "sheer pleasure to be with". Despite an ostensible language barrier, Eddie's instruction of the Indigenous Arts and Culture leave an impressionable impact on Davidson's character and personality. By accepting Eddie's guidance at a pivotal point in her journey, Davidson's ambivalent sense of self, the overwhelming feeling of being an imposter, is diminished. Davidson becomes more grounded and connected to her environment; the knowledge that she derives from key characters contributes to a distinct conformational change in her personality and thus critically assists her in developing a strong sense of one self. A similar theme resonates in *Into the Wild*, where Chris McCandless heavily relies upon the guidance of various prominent figures he meets throughout his journey as well as 'the characters of the books he loved from writers like Tolstoy, Jack London and Thoreau' whose words he could and often would 'summon....to suit any occasion'. The fact that McCandless readily referred to the words of the likes of Tolstoy, London, and Thoreau amidst times of mental angst and challenge, is a significant reflection of not only the quintessential teacher and student relationship he shares with them, but also the level of impact they have had in shaping in the ideological processes that define

Chris's values and sense of oneself. This very idea is furthered by Sean Penn when he depicts Christopher McCandless quoting soviet Russian poet, Boris Pasternak, suggesting that humans 'ought to call each thing by it's right name', following which he acts impulsively and with great haste, engineered with rapid and distorted camera movements. In doing so, Penn illustrates the importance that Chris places upon the words of such idealists to the stage where he acts upon their advice without giving them proper consideration within his literal, temporal context. The protagonists of both *Into the Wild* and *Tracks*, both rely upon the knowledge and guidance of individuals, be they physical or via literature, as a means of grappling with their fundamental understanding of the human spirit and in doing so their intricate understanding of themselves.

### Body Paragraph 2:

Both texts demonstrate a degree of discontentment and resent towards the institutionalized, '20th century convention' of family. Davidson describes the notion of family as "invisible ropes and chains" of guilt, she comments that families lack for the most part, a true sense of love. This sentiment is starkly contrasted with Davidson's intense engagement with the wild, which she describes in the language of love and connection. "I love you. i love you sky, bird, wind, desert, desert, desert" proclaims Davidson, as she describes having "no more loved ones to care about" and "no more ties" to bind her to material existence. Davidson laments the distortion of her journey for public consumption, stating "so far people had said that i wanted to commit suicide, that i wanted to do penance for my mother's death..." this comment is one of the only references to her mother's suicide, which can be interpreted as a catalyst for her ambivalence about the notion of family. This experience evidently informs Davidson's somewhat impenetrable exterior and suggests a deeper complexity to her resistance of 20th century societal expectations. Similarly, Christopher McCandless articulates a powerful contempt for family. McCandless feels impeded in his personal motivations by the familial concepts of 'graduating college' and 'getting a job' which he describes as "20th century inventions" inextricably linked with "this world of material excess". McCandless expands on this point, commenting that his pursuit for self-discovery has ultimately resulted in 'the killing of the false being within', the 'false being' that was bound to the societal expectations and the material conventions of the time. Chris' departure into the wild is as much of an act of punishment for his family, as it is about Chris discovering true freedom and metaphysical spirituality. It is this idea of 'telling the world' of his family's misdeeds that continually motivates Chris to continue on with his journey, which is depicted by Penn through the countless solo enactments and impersonation of both Chris' mother and father, often depicting a negative experience which has quite evidently scarred his 'crystal like' mind. Family is thus, a primary motivation for both key characters within *Tracks* and *Into the Wild* to firstly partake on their journey, but more significantly to discover an uncorrupted, unbiased 'true' version of them that had been lost amidst 'this world of material excess'.

### Conclusion:

Both *Tracks* and *Into the Wild* explore the inextricable link between one's environment and their personal growth. Nature is emphasised as a world removed from the materialistic excess

of modern urban life, in which one can engage with an alternative, radical set of values. Both Davidson and McCandless escape from the confinements of their lives and experience profound transformations over the course of their journeys. Thus, both Davidson and Penn comment on the omniscient, multifaceted nature of the environment around a person being instrumental in moulding each stage of the journey of self-discovery and transformation.